DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 681 SP 036 021

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TITLE Evolution of Novice through Expert Teachers' Recall.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 17-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; Classroom Research; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; *Recall (Psychology); *Reflective Teaching; Short Term Memory; Student Behavior; *Teacher Behavior; *Teaching Experience
IDENTIFIERS Experienced Teachers

ABSTRACT

This study examined the evolution of the accuracy and thoroughness of novice through expert teachers' recall of their own and their students' specific classroom behaviors. Elementary school teachers were observed teaching in a natural setting. Their classes were audiotaped, and detailed notes of the teachers' and students' specific classroom behaviors were recorded. A one-hour structured interview followed the observation. Infrequent inaccuracies in recall were noted with novices through teachers with 1 to 3.5 years experience; the teacher with 6.5 years experience and the experts exhibited accurate recall. Continua were observed from general recall that lacked thoroughness through very specific and thorough recall to general and apparently less thorough recall; and from hesitant, uncertain, inconsistent, strained recall to fluid, certain, consistent, and generally effortless recall. During analysis of the teachers' thoroughness of recall, the following themes emerged: (1) as teachers gained experience, their reported focus during teaching shifted from their own behaviors (novices) to their students' behaviors (intermediate group) to a combination of their own and their students' behaviors (experts); (2) teachers' reported focus did not consistently concur with the focus apparent in their oral recall until teachers had a minimum of 6.5 years experience; (3) novices recalled neutral behaviors, while more experienced teachers reported neutral, negative, and positive behaviors; and (4) teachers progressed in thoroughness of recall along different paths and at different rates. (JB)

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ED 383 681

EVOLUTION OF NOVICE THROUGH EXPERT TEACHERS' RECALL

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A Paper Presented at the Meetings of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, April 1995

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Evolution of Novice Through Expert Teachers' Recall

Ruth M. Allen and Renée M. Casbergue

Accuracy/thoroughness of recall is a necessary precursor to teachers achieving the capability of effective reflection. This study examined the evolution of accuracy/thoroughness of novice through expert teachers' recall of their own and their students' specific classroom behavior.

Elementary school teachers were observed teaching in a natural setting. Their classes were audiotaped, and detailed notes of the teachers' and students' specific classroom behaviors were recorded. A one hour structured interview followed the observation.

Novices recalled neutral behaviors and the more experienced teachers recalled neutral, negative and positive behaviors. Teachers progressed in thoroughness of recall along different paths and at different rates. Continua were observed from general, sporadic recall to specific, thorough recall to general, seemingly less thorough recall and from hesitant, uncertain, inconsistent, strained recall to fluid, certain, consistent, and generally effortless recall.

This data can guide teacher educators and administrators in planning curricula and preservice and inservice workshops.

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EVOLUTION OF NOVICE THROUGH EXPERT TEACHERS' RECALL

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Objective

Accuracy/thoroughness of recall is important because it is a necessary precursor to teachers achieving the capability of effective reflection. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the evolution of the accuracy/thoroughness of novice through expert teachers' recall of their own and their students' specific classroom behaviors as they progress in teaching experience over time.

Theoretical Framework

The investigation of recall differences of experts and novices (Chase & Simon, 1973; de Groot, 1965, 1966; and Larkin, McDermott, Simon & Simon, 1980), the development of the theory of expertise (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) and its subsequent application to teachers' growth in skill development by Berliner (1986, 1988, 1989), Borko and Livingston (1989), Bruer (1993), Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein, and Berliner (1988), Carter, Sabers, Cushing, Pinnegar, and Berliner (1987), Clarridge and Berliner (1991), Leinhardt and Greeno (1986), Livingston and Borko (1989), Peterson and Comeaux (1987), Sabers, Cushing and Berliner (1991), and Stepich (1991) provided direction for this research. While this body of research explores recall differences between novice and expert teachers, no researcher has included an intermediate group of teachers and described the cognitive development and continua related to the recall of classroom behaviors as one moves from novice to more experienced to expert teacher.

Methods/Data Source

The sample for the current study consisted of three groups of elementary school teachers: four novices, student teachers in their first or second week of actual teaching; five intermediate group teachers, teachers with 1 to 6.5 years experience; and three experts, teachers with 10 to 30 years experience. Qualitative methods were utilized in this research as described below.

The teachers were observed teaching in a natural setting for one class period by the primary researcher. The class was audiotaped, and the primary researcher recorded detailed notes of the teachers' and students' specific classroom behaviors were recorded. The primary researcher's observation skills in an elementary classroom setting were field tested by the co-author of this presentation who is certified in elementary education, taught at the elementary school level and continues to do research in elementary school classrooms. We visited an elementary school, observed three class periods at three grade levels and individually recorded our observations of the teachers' and the students' behaviors and our impressions of on/off-task behavior. After each observation we discussed our recorded observations and found we were in agreement in all aspects of the observations.

A one hour structured interview followed the observation during which teachers recalled their own and their students' specific classroom behaviors. Teachers' recall was prompted by statements such as "During this part of the interview the emphasis is only on you. We will begin with your first teaching method which was (a brief description will be given, e.g. you were giving instructions for the starting of the spelling lesson). Please recreate with as much detail as

possible, step-by-step, where you were standing, what you did physically during this segment of the class period, and what you said." Except for smiling or the nodding of the primary researcher's head to indicate the teacher was doing well, no reinforcement was provided while the teacher was recalling. When the teacher finished describing her classroom behaviors, (s)he was prompted with questions such as, "Can you tell me more?" or "Anything else?" or "Is there anything you want to add?" The interviews were audiotaped. The teachers' recall was subsequently compared to the recorded observations to determine the accuracy (correctness) and thoroughness (completeness) of their recall. Comparisons were made within groups and across groups. In addition teachers' responses to the interviews were analyzed for common themes.

Results

Infrequent inaccuracies in recall were noted with novices through teachers with 1 to 3.5 years experience. The teacher with 6.5 years experience and the experts exhibited accurate recall. When the teachers' impressions of on/off-task behaviors were compared to the primary researcher's recorded impressions, significant differences were noted with two novices who had numerous problems with student behavior; however, minimal differences were noted with the other two novices whose classes had minimal student behavioral problems, the intermediate group, and the experts.

During the analysis of teachers' thoroughness of recall, the following themes emerged. (1) As teachers gained experience, their reported focus during teaching shifted from their own behaviors (novices) to their students' behaviors (intermediate group) to a combination of their own and their students' behaviors (experts). (2) Teachers' reported focus did not consistently concur with the focus apparent in their oral recall until teachers had a minimum of 6.5 years experience. (3) Novices recalled neutral behaviors, and more experienced teachers recalled neutral, negative, and positive behaviors. (4) The findings also demonstrated that teachers progressed in thoroughness of recall along different paths and at different rates.

A continuum was observed from general recall that lacked thoroughness through very specific and thorough recall to general and apparently less thorough recall. It was concluded that the latter general recall indicated pattern formation, i.e. subsuming of specific behaviors, in the schemata of the four most experienced teachers. Another continuum was observed from hesitant, uncertain, inconsistent, strained recall to fluid, certain, consistent, and generally effortless recall.

Educational Significance

The findings of this study will facilitate teacher educators' and school administrators' understanding of the shifts and changes that occur in the development of the thoroughness of teachers' recall of their own and their students' classroom specific behaviors as well as the place in cognitive development typically evidenced in novices, intermediate groups of teachers, and in experts. The findings furnish meaningful information that can enable teacher educators and administrators to provide the most appropriate experiences at the preservice level.

Numerous universities have the development of effective reflective preservice teachers as their goal or salient theme. Yet in this study, holistic recall was not evident until the teachers had completed their student teaching plus one year of teaching. This finding indicates that the preservice teachers' schemata may not typically reach a level of development sufficient to allow adequate thorough/holistic recall. Without such recall, teachers may not have a realistic view of their own and their students' behaviors in the classroom. Therefore, when novices reflect, they may reflect on incomplete and sometimes erroneous information. The findings suggest that novices in isolation cannot be assumed to be effective reflectors. Thus, they may need direct, explicit experiences in guided reflection that allow them to see the gaps in their recall and focus on

appropriate aspects of their classroom environments. Further, those who have responsibility for supervising student teachers need to adjust their expectations to match these novices' development.

Data from this study can also serve as a guide to school systems and administrators when they plan inservice training programs. Too often beginning teachers are assumed to have more similar than different needs based on their novice status. These findings indicate that teachers vary in their ability to reflect, regardless of their experience. Therefore, the cognitive development of teachers must be understood by those who plan and evaluate programs so that teachers, regardless of their years of experience, can be met where they are in their development and be provided with the most appropriate activities to promote and ensure the continuance of each teacher's journey toward expertise.